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BALTIC DEFENSE MINISTERS SIGN COOPERATION PACT. Baltic Defense Ministers Enn Tupp (Estonia), Janis Trapans (Latvia), and Linas Linkevicius (Lithuania), meeting in Vilnius on 27 February, signed an agreement on closer defense cooperation, BNS and Interfax reported. The new accord updates a framework agreement on defense and security cooperation signed more than three years ago. The three states pledge to coordinate relations with the UN, NATO, the WEU, and those organizations' member countries. They will also jointly participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The defense ministers reportedly gave top priority during their discussions to cooperation in monitoring the Baltic republics' air space and territorial seas. The pact, however, is not a defense union: thus if one of the signatories were attacked by an aggressor, it would not be automatically defended by the other two. The Baltic defense ministers also announced that their deputies will meet in Riga in March to draw up an airspace monitoring agreement. -- Doug Clarke and Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

LATVIA, RUSSIA EXCHANGE RATIFICATION NOTES. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Sergei Krilov and Latvian Ambassador to Moscow Janis Peters, meeting in Moscow on 27 February, formally exchanged ratification notes of agreements signed in 1993-94, BNS reported. The accords cover the Russian troop withdrawal from Latvia; social guarantees for military pensioners; legal assistance and judicial relations in civil, family, and criminal cases; and protection of migrants' rights. The Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on 23 February appointed Charles Magee as head of its mission to Latvia to supervise the implementation of the agreement on social rights for Russian military retirees. The council also decided to visit regularly the Skrunda radar station during its dismantling. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

ESTONIAN TRADE DEFICIT DECLINED IN JANUARY. Customs officials announced that Estonian exports in January were worth 1.588 billion kroons ($136 million) and imports 2.023 billion kroons, resulting in a deficit of 441.1 million kroons or 224.2 million kroons less than in December, BNS reported on 27 February. Exports fell by 62.3 million kroons and imports by 286.5 million kroons. Finland, Russia, and Sweden accounted for the largest volume of both imports and exports. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.